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ABSTRACT

This handbook presents a collection of over 35 experiential and adventure-based activities using only a single item of equipment--a 15-foot long section of 1-inch tubular climbing webbing, called a raccoon circle. Some of the activities are quiet, some are loud, and they range from low to high challenge levels. Different-sized groups can be accommodated by using multiple lengths of raccoon circles. The activities address getting acquainted, motivation and energizing, consensus building, group connection, group problem solving, calmness and unity, goal setting, trust, skill building, high-level team skills, processing, debriefing, and closure. Nine of the author's favorite workshops, conference presentations, and training events are listed with a brief synopsis of each one. Six resources are presented along with seven other Raccoon Circle printed resources, books, and activity guides. (TD)

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Raccoon Circles

A Handbook for Facilitators

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Dedication

I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Tom Smith a few years ago, at the Bradford Woods Institute. In one morning session, Tom managed to lead a workshop filled with experiential and adventure-based activities, some quiet, some loud, from low to high challenge levels, using only a single item of equipment - a 15 foot long section of 1 inch tubular climbing webbing, which he calls a Raccoon Circle. In that amazing session, Tom showed us that it is not the most elaborate or grand pieces of adventure equipment that make a difference, sometimes it is the most simple.

I am pleased to dedicate this humble collection of webbing activities to Dr. Tom Smith, educator, innovator, colleague and friend, and thank him for so richly sharing all that he knows with us, and for bringing the Raccoon Circle into our lives.

I am also glad to introduce you to several other innovators of Raccoon Circle activities. You'll find contact information for these folks near the end of this publication.

The Plan

In the fall of 2001, the following Raccoon Circles activity pages were posted to the Teamwork and Teamplay website. You are now able to download the entire listing and explanation of activities. All that we ask, is that if you are going to copy this information, use it in a staff manual, pass it out at conferences or workshops, that you please copy the entire content - which is currently 18 pages. Many folks have worked hard to innovate and compile these activities. We hope you enjoy these 35+ activities, and that you will pass along the complete information from the website (safety, background, credits, activities, resources and contacts). Watch the Teamwork & Teamplay website in the spring of 2002 for more Raccoon Circle activities.

This Raccoon Circle document is available for a fee from Adventure Hardware (www.adventurehardware.com 1-800-706-0064), and free of charge, from the following websites:

www.teamworkandteamplay.com - or - www.frontiernet.net/~teamplay

Raccoon Circle Activities

www.teamworkandteamplay.com

The following activities have been created and shared by the facilitators, authors, teachers and adventure-based educators listed at the end of this publication. You are welcome, and in fact, encouraged to copy, freely distribute and share this information in any form (paper copies, electronic media, website links, faxes, etc.) All that we ask is that you copy or reproduce this ENTIRE document of 35+ activities, which is 18 pages long.

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1. The Basics

The Raccoon Circle consists of a single piece of tubular nylon climbing webbing, which can be purchased in a variety of colors from outdoor sporting goods stores, and specifically those stores that carry climbing gear and supplies. While a variety of other belt materials (such as those found at horse tack shops, pet stores and sewing supply stores) and even rope can be substituted, tubular climbing webbing is recommended. Tubular webbing is extremely strong (breaking strength is typically near 6000 pounds tensile loading), comfortable to hold, colorful, and can be easily washed when necessary.

Tubular climbing webbing does not stretch, which is also helpful for many of these activities. The activities listed here are performed with a Raccoon Circle that is approximately 15 feet (4.6 meters) in length. If you wish to accommodate larger groups, you can either join a few Raccoon Circles together with a water knot, or use a single, long Raccoon Circle. For most circular activities, you'll need about 1 foot (12 inches) of length for each person.

2. Water Knot Tying

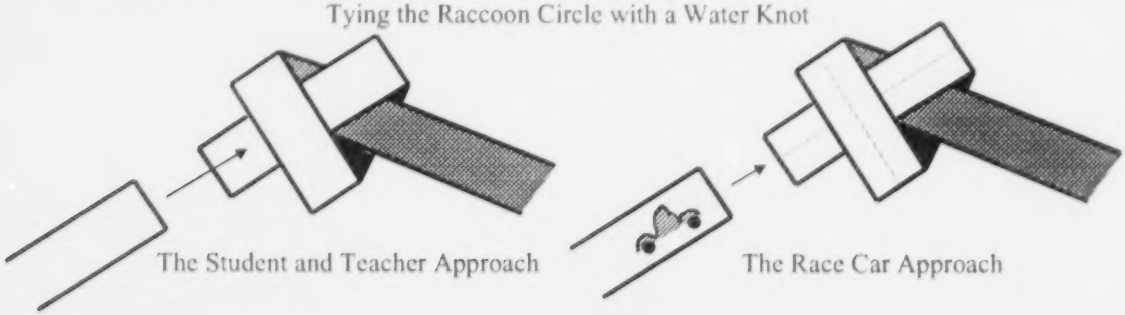
In addition to becoming acquainted with holding a Raccoon Circle, it is often necessary to form a circle or loop. While a variety of knots can be used, the water knot is one of the strongest and best. I learned that the "water knot" is so named because river rafting guides use such a knot with flat webbing, so that even when wet, the knot can easily be removed.

My favorite explanation of how to tie a water knot comes from fellow facilitator and friend Kirk Weisler of Utah. See the illustration below for details. Start by tying a simple (but loose) overhand knot in one end of the Raccoon Circle webbing, with a short tail (less than 2 inches is fine). Because of the flat webbing, this overhand knot will remain very flat. This first knot is the "teacher" or "mentor" knot.

Next travel the length of the webbing, unwinding and untwisting the webbing as you go, and hold the opposite end of the webbing. This end is the "student" end of the webbing. The student does everything the teacher does, they just happen to do it backwards. This means that (first), the student looks directly at the teacher (each tail end of the webbing nearly touches). Next, the student "doubles" the teacher by following the same path as the teacher backwards. This involves following the webbing, and finally tucking the student end of the webbing into the teacher knot, leaving about a 1 or 2 inch long tail. Now simply pull the opposite sides of the knot to secure it.

Since some participants may respond to a slightly different learning style, here is another brief method of teaching the water knot. Begin by tying the teacher knot so that the black stitching typically found running down the middle of most colorful webbing can be easily seen. This dashed line looks a bit like the line found running down the middle of many roads. The student end of the webbing is now seen as an automobile (or race car for faster knot makers) that simply needs to drive down the middle of the road to complete this knot.

Tying the Raccoon Circle with a Water Knot



The Student and Teacher Approach

The Race Car Approach

The Finished Water Knot

3. Grand Prix

Now that you have turned the Raccoon Circle into a complete circle or loop using a water knot, you are ready for the ultimate in sport racing. Thanks to Tom Heck for not only the idea for this activity, but also the enthusiasm to lead it effectively. This activity will boost the enthusiasm of your audience, and provide some moderate competition in the process.

Begin by spreading several Raccoon Circles around the available space, in close proximity to each other. Ask participants to join one of the "racing teams", picking their favorite color team in the process. You'll need approximately 5 to 10 participants per Raccoon Circle. Have participants hold the Raccoon Circle with both hands in front of them.

"Ladies and Gentlemen! It is summertime, and that means one thing in this part of the world - Grand Prix Racing! Now I know that you are such die-hard race fans that just the thought of a race makes your heart beat faster. So this race comes in three parts. First, when I say that "we're going to have a race", your response is a "Tim the Tool Man" response (sort of a grunting version of ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh-O!) Next I'll say, start your engines! and I want to hear your best race car sounds (audience practices making race car revving engine, shifting gears and braking sounds).

Finally, with so many cars on the track today, it will be difficult to see just which group finishes their race first, so we'll need a sign indicating when your group is finished. That sign is to raise your hands (and the Raccoon Circle) above your heads and yell "Yesssssssss!""

Logistically, Grand Prix involves having the group transfer the knot around the group as quickly as possible, using only their hands. This activity can even be performed for a seated audience. To begin, you'll need a "start / finish" line, which can be the person that was born the farthest distance away from the present location. The race begins at this location, and ends when the knot is passed around the circle, and returns to this same location (Yesssssss!)

Typically in Raccoon Circle Grand Prix racing, there are three qualifying rounds or races. The first race is a single lap race to the right, with the knot traveling once around the inside of the circle to the right (counterclockwise). The second race is a multi-lap race (two or three laps) to the left (clockwise) around the circle. And the final race of the series, is a "winner take all" championship race, with one lap to the right (counterclockwise) followed by one lap to the left (clockwise).

Incidentally, after this activity, the group will not only be energized, but perhaps in a slightly competitive mood. From a sequencing standpoint, you can either continue this atmosphere (with more competitive challenges - such as into a summer camp competition) or introduce a bit of counterpoint, by following this activity with one that requires the group working together in a collaborative manner.

4. Steal the Bacon

Here is a familiar playground game that works well with a Raccoon Circle. Wind the entire Raccoon Circle up into a tight ball or "hank" (like you might wind up an electrical cord or long section of rope). Now place this below the person guarding "the bacon." Other group members attempt to touch or steal the bacon, without being touched or tagged by the guard. The guard is not allowed to sit or stand on the bacon. Even though this is typically only a game, some interesting problem solving strategies and teamwork evolve during play. The more tightly wrapped the Raccoon Circle, the tougher the challenge. The longer "the bacon" the easier it is to steal without being tagged.

5. Making the Commitment - Outside In

At the beginning of many teambuilding or adventure-based learning activities, many facilitators will incorporate some form of group commitment ceremony, or at the minimum some form of informed consent regarding the activities about to be performed. Choosing the level of challenge, contracting between facilitator and participant, and presenting an environment where participants can choose to join in, without being coerced, are a valuable part of the team's commitment, and the group process of enabling a collection of individuals to work and play together.

To this end, Outside In is a brief activity where individuals make the conscious choice to "join" the group for the upcoming session. Place one or more Raccoon Circles on the ground, and have the group gather around the outside. After explaining the "contract" between a challenge course facilitator and the members of the group (i.e. choosing how to be a part of the challenge for the day, being fully present, listening to the other members of the group, keeping physical and emotional safety a priority, etc.), ask the group members to indicate their level of commitment to the event by approaching the Raccoon Circles, and entering a circle as far as their level of commitment. For some folks, this will mean standing at the center of one of the Raccoon Circles (fully committed). For others, this will mean standing within one of the Raccoon Circles (committed), or perhaps only one foot within a Raccoon Circle (partially committed). Finally, if the level of participation is a true option for your program, it is possible that some participants may initially be comfortable only when standing outside the commitment circle. While this may not be the desired or optimal situation, it does give you valuable feedback as a facilitator as to the whether your initial introduction to your program enables participants to make a commitment, or leave them slightly less than committed, given the information and contracting that you have presented.

Typically, most facilitators would like to have everyone within the commitment circle at the beginning of the program. There are however, at least two options available for the case where some participants are not yet there. First, you can thank the group for their input, and offer to revisit the team commitment later in the program (perhaps at the midpoint, and again at the end). Or you can discuss the level of commitment within the team, and request that in order to "begin" the event, you'll need to have everyone in contact with the Raccoon "commitment" Circle (either inside or outside). This, you can explain, is not a full commitment for anything that happens, but rather a commitment to begin the process of working as a team. If this second option is chosen, revisit the team commitment as the program continues (after a few more activities).

The purpose of Outside In, is to provide a visual check of the commitment level of the entire group, before beginning a teambuilding or adventure-based learning program. The location of participants will give the facilitator an indication of the commitment level of the group, to each other, and to the program itself.

As an alternate approach to Outside In, the facilitator can place three Raccoon Circles (for example, a red, green and blue Raccoon Circle) on the ground, and ask participants to join one of the three circles. The red Raccoon "commitment" Circle signifies that the participants are ready to fully commitment to the group and the team events that are about to begin. The green Raccoon "commitment" Circle signifies that the participants are willing to try, but will need some assistance and support from the group to be successful. The blue Raccoon "commitment" Circle signifies that the participants are basically willing to begin the process, but may have questions, concerns or comments that they would like to make before continuing.

A final variation of this alternate approach to Outside In, is to use three different sizes of Raccoon Circles to form a "target" on the ground. Where the inner circle represents the highest level of commitment (bullseye), the middle circle represents a medium level of commitment, and the outer circle represents the minimum level of commitment necessary to begin the program, presentation or process.

6. Knot Right Now

This activity is a modification of the Group Loop activity from Tom Heck called Knot Now. Instruct the entire group (up to 8 participants per Raccoon Circle) to grab hold of the straight webbing. Wherever they hold with their right hand must stay there, however the left hand can move, slide, or let go as necesary to make movement easy. The task is for the group to tie a single overhand knot in the Raccoon Circle. A simple method is for one of the end person to use both hands to tie a knot at the end!

7. Group Processing

In addition to the many games, teambuilding and problem solving activities involving the Raccoon Circle, one of the most interesting uses is for the processing or debriefing that typically follows a teambuilding or adventure-based learning activity. By its nature, the Raccoon Circle brings a group closer together. For teachers and camp counselors that are tired of saying over and over, "ok kids, let's get in a circle, a circle, c'mon, shoulder to shoulder, a circle you guys....." the Raccoon Circle provides an easier method, "ok everyone grab ahold!" The result is a close circular circle, with everyone attached, connected, visible to the rest of the group, and at a distance where conversation can occur without shouting. It is also a great place to demonstrate how everyone in the group has an effect on the rest of the participants. With everyone holding the Raccoon Circle, have the facilitator join them, and shake the Raccoon Circle. Notice that not only the participants near the facilitator are "disturbed" by this motion, but that it is transferred to everyone in the circle - the same way that negative comments affect not only the folks that hear them, but eventually everyone in the group. Next have everyone in the group, including the facilitator, pull lightly on the Raccoon Circle, so that they are balance, and leaning slightly backwards. If the facilitator now decides to let go, another type of disruptive wave goes through the group, disturbing the balance, and again, affecting everyone of the participants in the group. So being a part of the group, hanging in there so to speak, is also helpful to the success of the whole group.

Group Processing - Inside Out

One quick debriefing technique is to place the Raccoon Circle on the ground, with the entire group inside. Offer participants the opportunity to comment on the results of an activity. Once they have concluded, or decided not to talk, they are welcome to step outside the circle. For groups that may over-process, or constantly return to previous arguments or discussions, this approach means that when you're done talking, you're done talking. When everyone is outside the circle, it is time to move on. Or, a person still standing inside the circle can choose to exchange places with another outside the circle, effectively giving them an opportunity to be heard again.

Group Processing - Pass the Knot (The Talking Knot)

A second debriefing method is a variation of Believe It Or Knot, where the knot tied in the Raccoon Circle acts as a pointer, and the facilitator or other participant instructs the group to move the knot to the right (counterclockwise) or to the left (clockwise), then stop, and the person nearest the knot or pointer has the opportunity to speak. This technique chooses the person, rather than allowing a participant to make their own choice when to speak.

As a variation, use the Raccoon Circle as a talking stick, by allowing participants to move the knot around the circle, and when a person is ready to speak, stopping the knot when it is in front of them.

From the Teamwork & Teamplay Website at www.teamworkandteamplay.com

8. 2B or KNOT 2B

As a consensus building activity, 2B or KNOT 2B is one of my favorites. For this activity, you will need 5 different colors of Raccoon Circles for the first level, and 5 identical colors for level two. With a water knot, tie four of the Raccoon Circles into separate loops, then tie the fifth Raccoon Circle through the other four. Now place all five of these circles on the ground, in such a way that it is not immediately obvious which one of the five Raccoon Circles is holding the other four together. The object of the activity is for the group to come to a consensus on which Raccoon Circle they believe is holding the other four together. After completing this first level of 2B or KNOT 2B (with five different colors of webbing), encourage the group to try level two, where all five Raccoon Circles are the same color. Again, the object is for the entire group to come to a consensus as to which one of the five Raccoon Circles is holding the other four together, without touching any of them during the decision process.

8. 2B or KNOT 2B - Continued

For some groups, the facilitator may need to explain what consensus means, and perhaps why it is important in a group to utilize consensus. Next, the facilitator may choose to assist the group in coming to consensus, by asking how to check for consensus (visual sign, voting, verbal confirmation, etc.), partnering with others in the group, and asking pairs to vote on their choice, etc.
Finally, after the group has achieved consensus, the facilitator may choose to investigate the various styles of problem solving used to successfully complete this task.

For variations, a total of four Raccoon Circles makes the 2B or KNOT 2B set fairly easy. Eight Raccoon Circles in a set is very difficult (especially for the level two challenge - where all Raccoon Circles are the same color). Five, recommended here, is a medium challenge, but a good place to start, at least for level one.

The sketches shown on the next page, illustrate how to create a set of 2B or KNOT 2B Raccoon Circles with five pieces of webbing, and one example of how to lay these circles on the ground in a manner in which it is not immediately obvious which Raccoon Circle is holding the other four together.

Creating a Set of 2B or KNOT 2B Raccoon Circles

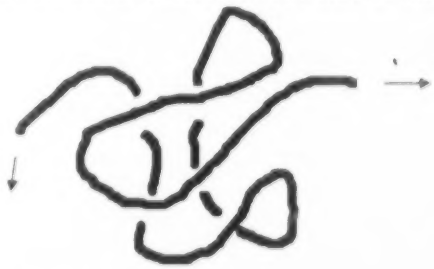
Placing the 2B or KNOT 2B Circles before the group

9. Not Knots

A natural consensus building activity to follow 2B or KNOT 2B is Not Knots. In this activity, which can be accomplished with only a single piece of webbing (in a straight line, without a water knot), a "doodle" is constructed (see examples below) and the group is given the choice of whether this doodle will create a KNOT or NOT A KNOT, when the ends of the webbing are pulled.

The object here is to provide the group with some tools to use when they cannot easily form a consensus. Typically, upon analysis, about half of the group thinks the doodle will form a knot, and the other half a straight line. If this is the case, ask participants to partner with another person that has a different viewpoint (i.e. one partner from the KNOT side, and one partner from the NOT A KNOT side). By learning how to listen to a person with a different viewpoint, group members learn how to cooperate. After this discussion, ask participants to choose sides, with the KNOT decision folks on one side of the knot doodle, and the NOT A KNOT folks on the other side.

At this point, it is likely that there will still not be a complete consensus within the group. Prior to slowly pulling the ends of the knot doodle, let the members of the group know that you will pull the knot doodle slowly, and that they can change sides at any time during the unraveling of the knot doodle (this illustrates the ability to make an initial decision, but still be flexible as more information becomes available).



10. Inside Out II

This is a great initial problem solving activity. Begin with a Raccoon Circle on the floor. Have the entire group step inside the circle. The task is now for the entire group to go from the inside of the circle to the outside, by going underneath the Raccoon Circle, without anyone in the group using their hands, arms or shoulders.

What is important in this activity is to stress the group problem solving process. In order for other members of the group to assist in the completion of the task, they need to know the plan, and what their part is in the solution. To this end, encourage the group to "plan their work" and then "work their plan." This means that prior to ANY action, the group will need to plan their approach to solving this problem, and making sure that everyone in the group knows their part of the plan.

After completing the task, debriefing questions include asking the group if they had a plan, and did they change the plan during the completion of the activity, and if so, why? As a second part to this activity, you can also ask the group to go Outside In, again without using their hands, arms or shoulders.... and see if they "plan their work" before "working their plan." Thanks to Tom Heck for this activity.

11. Tree of Knots

Here is a simple problem solving activity that is also listed in the book, Teamwork & Teamplay. Using two Raccoon Circles, tied with a water knot at one location (see sketch below).

The task is for the group to tie a square knot with the two sides of Raccoon Circle webbing shown. Participants are told that where they touch with their right hand must stay connected at that point throughout the activity, but they may use their left hand for guidance, and this hand may slide along the webbing or leave the webbing at any time if they wish.

12. A Knot Between Us

Using a section of Raccoon Circle between each person, tie and overhand knot loosely at the midpoint of each. Now instruct each member of the group to pick up one end of a Raccoon Circle with each hand, forming a horseshoe pattern (not a complete circle) with the entire group. The task is now for the group to untie each of the knots in the various pieces of Raccoon Circle webbing without letting go of the Raccoon Circles in their hands.

13. Tie the Knot

Tie the Knot is just the opposite of A Knot Between Us. The object of this activity is for a U-shaped group of participants, each holding a Raccoon Circle between them, to tie an overhand knot at the middle of each Raccoon Circles, without letting go of the webbing they are holding in each hand. This activity is a more complicated version of Knot Right Now, found in Section 5 of this publication.

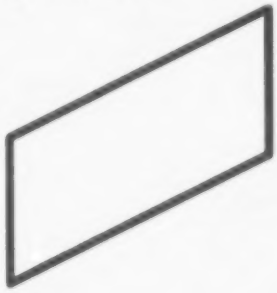
14. Over the Fence

Here is a simpler, and we believe improved, version of the Electric Fence. A photograph of this activity is shown on page 2 of this publication. Begin with two participants holding a Raccoon Circle, approximately 6 inches above ground level, with the opposite sides of the Raccoon Circle about 12 inches apart. Place half of the group on each side of the Raccoon Circle "fence." The first two persons (one from each side, one at a time) to cross the "fence" have the fence at 6 inches from the ground. The next two persons have the height increased to 12 inches, and so on. The maximum height, even for large groups is 4 feet (about 1.3 meters).

This version of the Electric Fence places spotters on both sides of the fence at all times. It also provides a changing level of challenge to the group. Even at the lowest levels, it is required that all participants crossing the fence, be in contact with at least 2 other participants at ALL times during the crossing. Allowing two participants to hold the Raccoon Circle also leaves an opportunity for a participant that may wish not to be passed over the fence. Or, if the holders do wish to pass over, they can rotate into and out of the holding positions with other team members during the event.

15. A Window of Opportunity

In a similar fashion to the Through the Fence initiative above, a vertical "window" is created between two holders with a Raccoon Circle. The task is now for each half of the group to transfer through the window of opportunity, without touching the Raccoon Circle. The size and location of the window, and the amount of challenge, can change with each participant.



16. Team Balance

This activity works for both small groups (using a single Raccoon Circle) and for incredibly large groups (by using multiple water knots to tie several Raccoon Circles together). Begin with the group holding the Raccoon Circle with both hands about a shoulder's width apart, and standing with their feet also about a shoulder's width apart. Next have the group pull the Raccoon Circle gently to form a complete circle, with some tension in the Raccoon Circle. Now by leaning outward from the circle (a small amount), the group should be able to balance the circle, and keep each other safely leaning outward. This is the first level of unity, calmness and balance. For level two, ask participants to keep holding the Raccoon Circle, but to bend their knees, and slowly and gently sit down, and then come back to a full standing, but still leaning position. This motion is appropriate for those individuals whose knees allow for this type of motion, without giving out! We have discovered that the number of knee "clicks" increases with the age of the group (light group laughter here!). The next level, level three, is for the group to close their eyes, and balance down and up twice, while the facilitator gives the commands. Finally, the level four challenge is for the group to balance down and up twice, but this time with their eyes closed, and with no one talking. Calm music playing in the background is nice for this activity. It can also be performed as a closing ceremony using some of the music suggested in the last activity of this publication. This activity is also at the ideal height for both standing and seated participants to work together, since both can hold the Raccoon Circle at about 3 feet off the ground.

17. The Wave

As a simple stretching exercise, have the members of the groups each hold the Raccoon Circle with their hands and feet approximately shoulders width apart (for balance) in a standing position. Next, have one person bend their knees and sit, while keeping their hands in contact with the Raccoon Circle. As they begin to sit, the next person to their right (counterclockwise) should begin to sit. As this sitting "wave" is passed around the circle, each person to the right continues to sit.

When the sitting wave has reached the opposite side from the original person (person #1), person #1 stands, and the standing portion of the wave passes to the right. When the entire group is in motion, a balanced wave exists, and participants can stretch and move in a well connected flow.

Essentially, folks need to watch the person on their left, and when that person begins to sit or stand, they should be ready to do the same. Do not rush this activity. The objective is to stretch slowly and keep some balance within the group.

18. Believe It or Knot

Thanks to Mike Anderson for this excellent get acquainted activity that is a variation of Two Truths and a Lie. With the entire group holding a Raccoon Circle (either seated or standing), the knot is used as a pointer to identify the person talking. Begin by passing the knot to the right around the group. Someone says "right there!" the knot stops, and the person nearest it has the opportunity to disclose some interesting fact about themselves, such as, "I have seen three movies this week!" It is now the discussion and responsibility of the rest of the participants to decide whether they believe that this information is true or false. After some discussion, the group gives their opinion of the validity or falseness of the disclosure, and the person providing the comment can tell the real story. This single comment version of Two Truths and a Lie, proceeds a bit more quickly for each person than the full blown version. Use either, as time permits.

After a person has revealed the true nature of their comments (true or false), they say "left" or "right" and then "right there!", and a new person has the opportunity to disclose something to the group.

The level of disclosure to the group is often a measure of the closeness, unity and respect within the group. For example, a disclosure such as, "I have traveled to another country," is a lower level of disclosure than "I have some a family member that is in trouble with the law." Depending on the group setting, and the purpose of this activity for your group, different levels of information or disclosure are appropriate. As the group becomes more unified, this activity can bring out greater disclosure between members of the group, family members, members of a team, etc.

From the Teamwork & Teamplay Website at www.teamworkandteamplay.com

19. The Bus

Possibly one of the greatest needs within a group is to identify the commonalities of the members. Chris Cavert says (with regard to some of the tough middle school students that he often encounters) that, "the more I know about you, the less likely I am to hurt you." Which typically means that the more students have in common with each other, the more they recognize the commonalities rather than the differences, the more likely they are to include those other people, the more likely they are to be nice to them, to protect them, and the less likely they are to steal, hurt or be mean to them. To this end, our goal is to find out some of those commonalities that we have with each other. The more unusual and unique, the better.

The Bus requires two Raccoon Circle Lines, stretched parallel to each other. Have participants "get on the bus" by standing between these two lines. At the first stop, have folks get off the bus, according to what is there for them on the left or right sides of the bus. First stop, chocolate ice cream on the left side, vanilla ice cream on the right. Now look around you, you have something in common with those folks on your same side of the bus. Now back on the bus, next stop:

19. The Bus - Continued

Cats		Dogs
Loud		Quiet
Running	the	Walking
Save Money	BUS	Spend Money
Bus Driver		Bus Rider
Sky Diving		Deep Sea Diving
Problem Solver		Problem Maker
Hamburgers or Hotdogs		Chicken or Salad

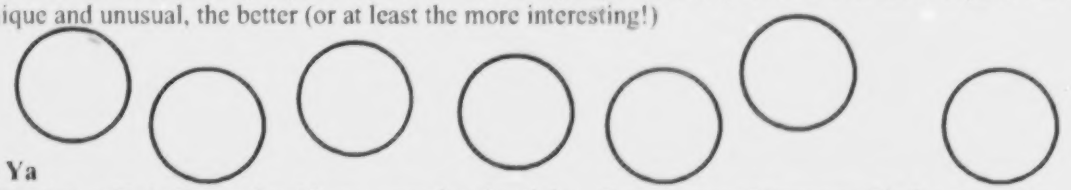
The object here is to find interests, activities and events that folks have in common. Be careful to choose topics appropriately for the audience that you are serving. This activity can be used with even large audiences, provided that the folks on the bus can hear the bus driver! Thanks to Tom Heck for sharing this activity.

20. Commonalities

Begin with partners for this activity. This conversational activity has the goal of identifying unique and sometimes unusual events, activities and life experiences that we have in common with other members of our group. The two partners need to identify three unique items that they have in common. Encourage participants to dig deep for these items. For example, they may discover that they both like dogs, but under closer examination, they may also discover that they like the same breed of dog. Additionally, they may discover that they both enjoy reading, but by digging a bit deeper, they may discover that they have read the same book in the past 6 months or perhaps enjoy the same author.

After identifying three attributes that they have in common, these two partners raise their hands, and find another group of two ready to form a group of four. Now the challenge is to identify 2 items that they have in common. Again, look deep, and no fair using any of the attributes already identified.

Finally, after this group of four finds out what they have in common, they raise their hands and join another group of four, for a total of eight, now standing inside one of the Raccoon Circles spread around on the floor. The goal for these eight is to find ONE event, interest or activity that they have in common. Have each of these groups of eight tell the other groups what they have in common. Again, the more unique and unusual, the better (or at least the more interesting!)



21. See Ya

Thanks to Chris Cavert for this get acquainted activity. Spread several Raccoon Circles around on the ground (about one for every four or five people). Now place four or five participants into each Raccoon Circle. Like the activities Commonalities, the object here is for folks to discuss some things that they may have in common, and then to decide which person has the most (or least, or best, etc.) of these. For example, in your groups of four or five participants, find out who has the most brothers and sisters. The facilitator should allow the group about a minute or so to discuss this, and leave a bit of time to learn the names of everyone in the circle. Then, the facilitator says loudly, "one, two three," and the rest of the group says loudly, "See Ya!" as they bid farewell to the person with the most brothers and sisters. This person then moves on to another circle, learns the names of the folks there, and a new question is given to the group, such as, "who has visited the most different countries," which typically not only brings about the number of countries, but perhaps a few stories about some unusual or interesting locations that the folks in the group have visited. After a few minutes, "one, two, three..... See Ya!"

21. See Ya - Continued

For additional time or to learn a bit more about the other folks in the group, the facilitator can prepare two questions for each encounter. The first should be a topic that the whole group can discuss and for which they are likely to have something in common. For example, what is the best desert you have ever had? Then the second question can be a brief one, followed by "one, two, three..... See Ya!"

22. Pass the Loop

This event is both a typical warm-up activity, and an opportunity for cooperation. With the entire group holding hands in a circle, ask them to pass a Raccoon Circle (like a hoola hoop) completely around the circle, without letting go of the person next to them. Encourage participants that this is not a race (unless that is what you would like). After completing one full circle, the facilitator can add a second Raccoon Circle, perhaps a bit smaller, and ask that one Raccoon Circle move to the left (clockwise), while the second Raccoon Circle moves to the right (counterclockwise).

For a higher level of cooperation, take a 15 foot long Raccoon Circle, and tie a knot at the midpoint so that there is now a figure-8 Raccoon Circle. Now the object is to pass the lower end of the 8 to the left, while the upper circle of the 8 goes to the right. This version will allow more participants to be involved at the same time.

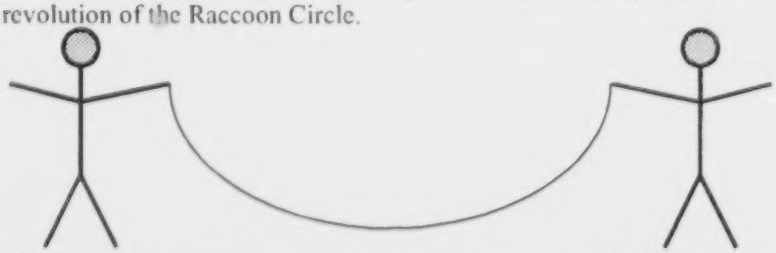
23. Traffic Circle

Traffic Circle uses a single Raccoon Circle that has been overlapped to form an even smaller circle (about 2.5 feet (0.8 meters)) in diameter, or roughly the size of a small hoola hoop. This circle is placed at the center of the group. The task (surprisingly simple), is for each member of the group, and their opposite partner, to exchange places, by passing through the middle of the circle, each touching one body part (foot, hand, nose...) in the Raccoon Circle, at the same time, and then continuing on to stand in the place where their partner was. All this must be accomplished without touching their partner, or the Raccoon Circle, and both participants must be in contact with the ground inside the Raccoon Circle at the same time. The group should set a goal to perform this task as quickly as possible.

Sam Sikes encourages this activity with the addition of several set mouse traps in the area around the traffic circle, or perhaps to exchange the traffic circle entirely with a set mouse trap located on a small table at the center of the group. An interesting risk factor here. Be extra careful!

24. Turnstile (Community Jump Rope)

Turnstile, or the Community Jump Rope, is an activity where two participants (or facilitators) turn the Raccoon Circle webbing like a jump rope, and the participants must travel underneath the webbing in order until the entire group has successfully passed through. Variations include the direction that participants must travel (i.e. whether they must jump over the webbing during the passage, or merely travel under it as it swings around). Another variation is that once the first participant passes through the swinging webbing, every other participant in the group must pass through on successive swings (that is, there can be no revolution of the Raccoon Circle without a participant passing through). A final variation is that participants must pass through, single, then as a paired couple, then by fours, and finally the whole group within one revolution of the Raccoon Circle.



25. The Meter

With one Raccoon Circle, make and arch shape like the one shown here. This is your fuel gauge, or any type of meter that you wish. Ask participants to stand outside the meter, at the position that best relates to them. For example, the amount of energy that you have right now, could be just like a gas tank gauge (empty, half a tank, full). This activity acquaints participants with each other, indicates preferences, and lets us find out about each other. Thanks (again) to Tom Heck for sharing this simple but powerful activity.

26. Four in a Circle (In the Loop)

Thanks to Rick French of Pack, Paddle & Ski for this interesting get acquainted debriefing and/or closure activity. In a similar fashion to See Ya, spread a few Raccoon Circles around on the ground. Enough for the entire group, with about four people in each circle.

As a goal setting activity, ask the participants to share with the others in their circle the goals they have for themselves and for the group that day. After a few minutes, ask each circle to say to the whole group some of these goals. A facilitator should be available to write these goals down on a large piece of paper (you'll see why in a minute). Ask the participants to all go to a new circle, with four new people in it. Continue goal setting, or ask another goal oriented question, and record the responses.

For debriefing, this 4 in a Circle activity (which could be done with 2,3 or 4 participants) allows simultaneous discussions, so that the whole group can have a chance to express their feelings. This may allow a debriefing process that takes a bit less time when a large group is involved, while not diminishing the need to share and discuss. After each topic of discussion, participants can be encouraged to join another new circle, with four new people.

As a closing activity, let the group reflect back on the original goals mentioned above, and evaluate whether those goals were met during the event. This format is also a nice way to say good-bye in small groups, using some discussion and a close proximity of participants to each other.

From the Teamwork & Teamplay Website at www.teamworkandteamplay.com

27. Moving Towards Extinction

This activity will require several (about a dozen) Raccoon Circles, and is useful for groups of 12 to 50 people. The task is for each member of the group to find a "safe place" to be when a "shark" is spotted in the surrounding water.

Begin by spreading about a dozen Raccoon Circles around the floor. These will be the safe islands. Ask members of the group to swim, boat, jet ski or snorkel about in the surrounding waters, but be cautious. If the lifeguard (facilitator) should yell "shark" members of the group can become safe by placing their feet within the perimeter of the Raccoon Circle islands (illustrate this by having a facilitator standing within an island, for visual clarity). After the first sighting of a shark, the facilitator removes one of the islands, and the participants again venture into the murky waters.

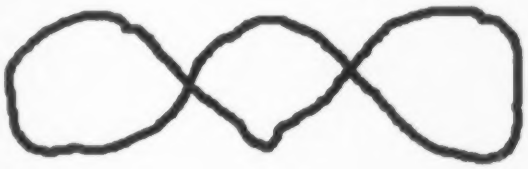
If you begin this activity with the Raccoon Circle webbing untied, but simply placed in a circle - you will leave open the possibility for the participants to combine islands. This will produce a collaboration rather than a competition effect as the resources continue to diminish.

A final possibility, as the number of islands reduces to one or two, is for the members of the group to combine islands (thinking outside the box), sitting on the ground so that their feet ARE within the perimeter of an island (even though their body is not), or (really outside the box - in fact, let's throw away the box), with ZERO islands, by placing their feet in a CIRCLE.

28. Trust Lift

As part of a complete trust sequence, the trust lift can be a very profound ending activity, without the need for a trust fall, trust dive, or some other higher adventure trust event. The trust lift, birdlofting,

reaching for the sky, etc. basically involves the members of a group carefully and safely lifting a member of their team. While this can be done with hands only, some participants prefer the Raccoon Circle approach, because it does not involve contact with all parts of the participants body. While the explanation below describes the use of a Raccoon Circle for the Trust Lift, additional facilitator intervention is necessary for a safe and successful trust sequence. Be careful, and use appropriate spotting techniques. Begin by creating a double hourglass shape with a Raccoon Circle (see below):



This shape forms the "cradle" or "litter" that will be used to lift the person. It also provides comfortable handholds, and a comfortable and supportive cradle for the person being lifted. After lifting the participant, the cradle can be gently rocked back and forth for a very relaxing experience.

29. Rope Jousting

Here is a fun activity for two participants that requires balance, skill and a certain amount of understanding and anticipating the other player's moves. Use two Raccoon Circles that have been tied together with a single water knot in the middle, to form a 30 foot (9 meters) long line. Use other Raccoon Circles to form two 15 inch diameter circles (these are called zones) 10 feet (3 meters) apart.

Two contenders (participants) now stand in their zones with the 30 foot long Raccoon Circle nearby. The object is to make the other person either let go of the Raccoon Circle, or to step outside their zone by pulling, yanking and controlling the 30 foot long Raccoon Circle.

Check out the New Games Book (ISBN 0-385-12516-X), pages 30 & 31, and you'll find an activity entitled "Hunker Hawser." You'll also find two interesting variations to this activity, by using three raccoon circles in a Y formation, or a circular version made by tying several raccoon circles into one large circle.

30. Photo Finish

Thanks to Sam Sikes for this seemingly simple but yet complex activity. You can find this and other activities in his book, Executive Marbles (1-888-622-4203).

Photo Finish (or the Finish Line) uses one or more Raccoon Circles as a straight line. The task is for the members of a group to ALL cross the line at exactly the same time. You can additionally "stress" the group by minimizing the available space that they have to plan prior to crossing the finish line.

Tell the group that they have 15 minutes to make 5 attempts to cross the finish line at exactly the same time. This is a great opportunity to use a digital camera for instant feedback. Every time someone breaks the plane of the finish line, the facilitator yells, "Click!" even for the occasionally careless mistake.

This activity involves planning, communication, timing and occasionally the ability to deal with frustration.

31. Closing Activities

Tying It All Together - Use several Raccoon Circles tied together (perhaps with the school, college or corporate colors of the organization you are working with) to form a large circle. Then ask the group to perform the Team Balance activity.

The Final Transmission - You can create a large "gear" system, by using a variety of colorful Raccoon Circles, and then asking various groups to "mesh" together, with participants turning like gears. This is an opportunity to say good-bye (or hello) to many of the other participants.

One (Thought) For The Road - Using the format of the activities Believe It Or Knot, or Group Processing, have someone suggest moving the knot to the right (or left), then saying "stop", and the person nearest the knot has the opportunity to express a brief closing thought, or simply say "thank you" or "pass."

A Double Raccoon Circle - With half of the group standing in a circle holding the Raccoon Circle, the other half stands just behind them (one person in the outer circle behind a person in the inner circle). The inside circle closes their eyes, and the outer circle has the opportunity to express a positive comment to their inside circle partner. For tactile audiences (in other words, where appropriate), the outer circle can place their hands on the shoulders of their inner circle partners, and whisper into their ears. Typical comments might include, "it was great meeting you, thanks for being in our group this weekend, I am looking forward to working with you, thanks for your help with the problem solving activity - I couldn't have done it without you!" This activity however is NOT a two way conversation - the only response from the inner circle is "thank you." This avoids breaking the mood with laughter, giggling or any other fun but disruptive conversation.

When finished, outside circle participants move one person to their right, until they have encountered all the inside circle participants. Then the inner and outer circles trade places.

Encore! During the above activities, try using some of the following music to reinforce the circles theme of the Raccoon Circle:

Circle of Life	Walt Disney	Lion King Soundtrack
All my Life's a Circle	Harry Chapin	Greatest Stories Live
Circle of Friends	Paul Winter Consort	Double Album

Notes:

Teamwork & Teamplay, by Jim Cain, was awarded the Karl Rohnke Creativity Award by the Association for Experiential Education. You can obtain a copy of this award winning adventure-based book directly from the publisher, Kendall/Hunt, at 1-800-228-0810, or at www.kendallhunt.com

From the Teamwork & Teamplay Website at www.teamworkandteamplay.com

Teamwork & Teamplay

The Adventure-Based Training Company

Some Information about Dr. Jim Cain

Dr. Jim Cain is the author of the award winning adventure-based text Teamwork & Teamplay, which received the Karl Rohnke Creativity Award presented by the Association for Experiential Education. He is the Executive Director of the Association for Challenge Course Technology, and manager of the Cornell University Corporate Teambuilding Program. In the past 3 years, he has presented and facilitated more than 500 teambuilding programs in 36 states and 9 countries. Jim makes his home in Brockport, New York. From 1983 to 1998, he worked as a senior research engineer for Eastman Kodak. He holds a Bachelor degree from YSU, Master degrees from RIT and U of R, and a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Rochester. Dr. Cain frequently serves as a visiting professor on subjects ranging from experiential education to challenge and adventure-based activities, and from recreational dancing and games leadership, to structural engineering, chaos and powder mechanics. He is presently working on three new adventure-based and teambuilding projects, including Teambuilding Hardware with Sam Sikes and Chris Cavert, A Facilitation Guide and a second volume of Teamwork & Teamplay activities. Visit the Teamwork & Teamplay website for more info.

Workshops and Training Events

Here is a collection of some of my favorite workshops, conference presentations and training events. You can request any of these prepared programs for your event, or a custom designed program.

Teamwork & Teamplay - An active workshops based on the title of the award winning book.

The Nuts and Bolts of Building Portable Challenge and Adventure Equipment - Build you own adventure equipment and learn how to facilitate these activities.

Wings, Strings and Flying Things - This workshop utilizes a variety of flying, floating and soaring devices to encourage an interest in science, physics and just for fun.

Traveling Light - This workshop utilizes the lightweight props found in Teamwork & Teamplay (like Raccoon Circles), and is ideal for those that lead adventure activities and wish to travel light.

Dancing in Lines, Squares and Circles - Jim is a third generation square dance caller, musician and dancer, and this workshop shares some of that heritage in a fun and community building session.

The Elements of a Truly Outstanding Challenge Program - This workshop is intended to acquaint the participant with the basic elements of establishing an outstanding challenge program.

Working and Playing in Groups. Using the 5 stages of group performance (Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Transforming), this single or multiple day workshop leads a team through the various stages of performance, and encourages honesty, respect, feedback, open communication and teamwork, as the group pulls together, overcomes difficulties, and really learns how to work together.

The Challenge Course in the 21st Century - As Executive Director of the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT), Dr. Cain presents a variety of topics related to ropes courses and adventure-based education in North America and around the world.

Staff Training and Train the Trainer Programs - Train your staff with Teamwork & Teamplay activities, equipment and resource materials. Half day to 3 day programs available.

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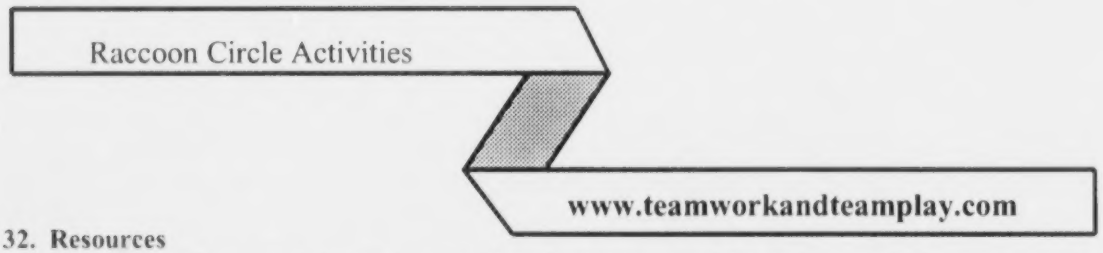
Email: jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com or teamplay@frontiernet.net
Website: www.teamworkandteamplay.com or www.frontiernet.net/~teamplay



32. Resources

For more information about adventure-based programs and Raccoon Circle activities contact:

Dr. Tom Smith, Raccoon Institute Box 695 Cazenovia,WI 53924 Phone(608) 983-2327

Dr. Jim Cain, Teamwork & Teamplay 468 Salmon Creek Road Brockport, New York 14420 USA
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Email: jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com Website: www.teamworkandteamplay.com
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Tom Heck, Life Coach Inc. P. O. Box 1831 Asheville, NC 28802
Phone (828) 665-0303 Fax (828) 670-7631 Email: tom@tomheck.com Website: www.tomheck.com

Jay "Mike" Cottam 912 East 10715 South Sandy, Utah 84094 Phone (801) 572-0151

Michelle Cummings, Training Wheels , Info@training-wheels.com www.training-wheels.com
1612 Parkside Circle, Lafayette, CO 80026 Phone (303) 926-4154 Fax (303) 926-4157

Chris Cavert, FUNdoing Inc. Phone 1-888-638-6565 chris@fundoing.com www.fundoing.com

33. Books and other resources that contain Raccoon Circle activities:

Raccoon Circles, 1996, by Tom Smith 32 pages of activities, history, references and ideas.

Teamwork & Teamplay, 1998, by Jim Cain and Barry Jolliff, Kendall Hunt Publishers, Dubuque, Iowa Phone (1-800-228-0810) ISBN 0-7872-4532-1 419 pages of portable adventure-based activities, equipment, resources and references, with many activities that can be performed using Raccoon Circles.

Freedom Circles - An Experiential Tool for Group Development, by Jay Mike Cottam. 49 pages of activities that explore respect, celebration, balance, play, competition, listening and sharing.

The Group Loop Activity Guide - 22 Fun Group Activities that enhance community, teamwork, leadership and creative problem-solving, by Tom Heck. www.tomheck.com

Raccoon Circles - A Handbook for Facilitators (With 35 Activities), by Jim Cain, October 2001
Teamwork & Teamplay Website www.teamworkandteamplay.com/raccooncircles.html
18 pages of activities and illustrations for making the Raccoon Circle a popular part of your programs.

Lines and Loops - Community Building Activities with Webbing, by Chris Cavert. 22 pages of activities, illustrations and references. Phone(888)638-6565 chris@fundoing.com www.fundoing.com

The Adventure Group P.O.Box 69 Jonas Ridge, NC 28641 Phone (800)706-0064
Carries Raccoon Circles and several other small, portable adventure-based learning props in the Teamwork & Teamplay Team Kit, including this publication and other Teamwork & Teamplay equipment, plus all levels of adventure-based training. Website: www.adventurehardware.com

From the Teamwork & Teamplay Website at www.teamworkandteamplay.com